

Message Text

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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 TEL AVIV 11400

EXDIS DISTRIBUTE AS NODIS

NEA FOR ASST SEC SAUNDERS AND AMBASSADOR LEWIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, IS, LE, SY
SUBJECT: MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER BEGIN ON LEBANON

REFS: A) STATE 220265; B) TEL AVIV 11335; C) STATE 220266

1. SUMMARY: THE WEDNESDAY MORNING (AUG. 30) MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER BEGIN, DAYAN AND WEIZMAN CENTERED ON LEBANON. ALL THREE DESCRIBED THE GOI'S GRAVE CONCERN OVER DEVELOPMENTS THERE AND THEIR CONVICTIONS THAT SYRIA INTENDS TO WIPE OUT THE MARONITE FORCES AND TURN LEBANON INTO A PART OF GREATER SYRIA. THEY BELIEVE THAT THE SYRIANS ARE USING THE PRE-CAMP DAVID PERIOD AS A COVER FOR THEIR MILITARY ACTIONS IN THE BELIEF THAT ISRAEL WILL BE HESITANT TO RESPOND. IN FACT, ISRAEL CANNOT ACCEPT SYRIAN DOMINATION OF LEBANON AND WILL HAVE TO

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CONSIDER GREATER MILITARY INVOLVEMENT THERE SHOULD THE SYRIANS BLOCKADE OR CAPTURE THE NORTHERN PORTS, TRY TO OCCUPY CHRISTIAN AREAS OF BEIRUT, OR CONTINUE TO INTERFERE WITH ISRAELI RECONNAISSANCE FLIGHTS. THEY EMPHASIZED THAT ISRAEL CANNOT ALLOW THE SITUATION IN LEBANON TO CONTINUE TO DETERIORATE DURING THE CAMP DAVID PERIOD. IF ISRAEL FEELS IT MUST ACT, IT WILL ACT IN

ENOUGH FORCE TO CONVINCE THE SYRIANS OF ISRAELI SERIOUSNESS. PRIME MINISTER BEGIN EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR US EFFORTS TO REASON WITH THE PARTIES INVOLVED, BUT HE PROPOSES THAT PRESIDENT CARTER ALSO SEND A LETTER TO ASSAD IMMEDIATELY PROPOSING A CEASE-FIRE AND STAND-FAST IN THE WEEKS AHEAD. HE ASKED THAT WE GET AN URGENT RESPONSE TO HIS PROPOSAL SO THAT THE PARTICIPANTS AT CAMP DAVID WOULD NOT ALL BE DISTRACTED BY WORRIES OVER LEBANON. END SUMMARY

2. I MET FOR AN HOUR WEDNESDAY MORNING WITH PM BEGIN, FONMIN DAYAN AND DEFMIN WEIZMAN. COL. TEHILA AND ELIE RUBENSTEIN WERE ALSO PRESENT. AS ANTICIPATED, THE SUBJECT ON THEIR MINDS WAS LEBANON. THE ATMOSPHERE WAS SERIOUS BUT THE PARTICIPANTS DID NOT SEEM PARTICULARLY TENSE.

3. PM BEGIN LED OFF THE DISCUSSION. HIS REMARKS WERE BRIEF AND TO THE POINT. THE LEBANESE SITUATION IS NEARING A GRAVE CRISIS, HE SAID. THE SYRIAN ARMY HAS TURNED ITS TANKS AND GUNS AGAINST THE CIVILIAN POPULATION. ISRAEL WANTS A SUCCESSFUL CAMP DAVID, HE SAID, BUT IT NEEDS US HELP OVER THE NEXT FEW WEEKS TO CONTAIN THE SITUATION IN LEBANON. THE SYRIANS ARE NOW TRYING TO CRUSH THE MARONITES AND TO TAKE OVER CONTROL OF THE COUNTRY. THEY ARE ATTEMPTING TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE
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PERIOD BEFORE CAMP DAVID TO DO THIS BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE ISRAEL WILL BE RELUCTANT TO ACT STRONGLY IN LEBANON AT THIS TIME.

4. THE GOI CANNOT PERMIT THIS COURSE OF DEVELOPMENT TO CONTINUE, THE PM SAID. IT HAS A MORAL COMMITMENT TO PREVENT THE MASSACRE OF A NATIONAL RELIGIOUS MINORITY. NO ONE ELSE IS HELPING THE CHRISTIANS AND IT IS AN INTOLERABLE THOUGHT THAT THEY BE WIPED OUT.

5. THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THAT, IN VIEW OF THE ABOVE, HE WANTED TO MAKE A REQUEST OF THE US GOVERNMENT. HE PROPOSED THAT THERE BE ANOTHER AMERICAN REPRESENTATION IN DAMASCUS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE DEMANDING AN IMMEDIATE CEASE-FIRE IN BEIRUT AND ELSEWHERE. IF THIS CAN BE ARRANGED, THE PARTICIPANTS CAN GO TO CAMP DAVID "WITH A CLEAR HEAD" AND NOT HAVE TO WORRY EVERY DAY ABOUT WHAT IS GOING ON IN LEBANON.

6. DEFENSE MINISTER WEIZMAN SAID THAT HE WOULD LIKE TO EMPHASIZE THE SECURITY PART OF THE LEBANESE EQUATION. UNTIL TEN YEARS AGO, WHEN THE PLO ARRIVED, LEBANON WAS

QUIET. TODAY THERE IS NOT ONLY AN ATTEMPT TO DESTROY THE MARONITES AND IMPOSE THE SYRIAN WILL ON LEBANON, BUT SYRIAN OCCUPATION OF LEBANON THREATENS THE NORTHERN FRONTIER OF ISRAEL. IF IRAQ'S APPRECIABLE FORCE, WHICH CAN BE MOVED TO THE AREA ON SHORT NOTICE IS ADDED, ISRAEL CAN FIND ITSELF ENCIRCLED ON THE NORTHERN FRONT. ISRAEL CANNOT TOLERATE THE OCCUPATION OF LEBANON BY SYRIA.

7. UNTIL RECENTLY, WEIZMAN CONTINUED, IDF AIRCRAFT HAD FLOWN OVER LEBANON ON RECONNAISSANCE MISSIONS UNCONTESTED

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BY THE SYRIANS. IN THE LAST TWO WEEKS, HOWEVER, THERE HAVE BEEN TWO ATTEMPTS BY SYRIAN MIGS TO INTERCEPT THE ISRAELI PLANES. IN WEIZMAN'S OPINION IT IS ONLY A QUESTION OF TIME BEFORE THERE WILL BE AERIAL CLASHES AND THEN THE WHOLE MATTER WILL ESCALATE FURTHER. ISRAEL MUST BE ABLE TO CONTINUE ITS AIR RECONNAISSANCE UNCHALLENGED.

8. DAYAN PICKED UP ON BOTH THE MORAL AND SECURITY THEMES. HE ASKED WHAT THE USG POSITION WOULD BE IF SYRIA HAS DECIDED TO TAKE OVER LEBANON. THIS WOULD BE A MAJOR

CHANGE IN THE SITUATION, HE SAID. IT APPEARS THAT SYRIA HAS DECIDED TO GO AHEAD AND IGNORE OTHER COUNTRIES ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT NO ONE WILL STOP IT. HE ASKED RHETORICALLY "IS ISRAEL TO SIT IDLE?" ISRAEL HAS A DILEMMA, DAYAN CONTINUED. THE US IS ASKING THE IDF
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TO STAY OUT OF LEBANON AND YET THE SYRIANS ARE TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE SITUATION. DAYAN ASKED "WHAT WOULD BE YOUR REACTION TO OUR REACTION IF ISRAEL INTERVENED ONE WAY OR ANOTHER?" "HOW DOES THE US FEEL ABOUT LEBANON BECOMING A PART OF GREATER SYRIA?" DAYAN PREDICTED THAT THIS WILL MEAN SHORTLY THE INTRODUCTION OF SOVIET SURFACE-TO-AIR MISSILES AND OTHER SOPHISTICATED EQUIPMENT INTO LEBANON AND ISRAEL WILL BE FACING AN ENEMY ON ITS NORTHERN BORDER.

9. "HOW HAS THIS COME TO BE," DAYAN ASKED? ISRAELI PLANES HAVE ONLY BEEN TAKING PICTURES AND, FROM THESE, SUPPLYING INFORMATION TO THE CHRISTIANS ON THE LOCATIONS OF SYRIAN ARTILLERY. THE SECURITY COUNCIL TALKS ABOUT THE RESTORATION OF LEBANESE SOVEREIGNTY, NOT SYRIAN. HE SPECULATED THAT MAYBE IT IS ONLY A COINCIDENCE THAT ALL THIS IS HAPPENING DURING THE PREPARATIONS FOR CAMP DAVID (ALTHOUGH HE CLEARLY DID NOT ACCEPT THIS AS A SERIOUS THOUGHT). IN ANY CASE, ISRAEL IS BEING ACCUSED BY THE LEBANESE CHRISTIANS OF HAVING REDUCED THEIR ASSISTANCE BECAUSE OF THE CAMP DAVID PREPARATIONS. "DOES THE US WANT TO MAINTAIN A STATUS QUO, A CEASE-FIRE, AND NO INTERFERENCE WITH IDF PLANES OR DOES THE US WANT LEBANON TO BECOME A PART OF GREATER SYRIA?" DAYAN MUSED THAT REGARDLESS OF WHETHER THE US THINKS THIS DEVELOPMENT WOULD BE GOOD OR BAD, THE US MAY HAVE CONCLUDED THAT IT CANNOT AFFECT THE OUTCOME.

10. ISRAEL DOES NOT WANT TO BE IN THE POSITION THREE MONTHS FROM NOW OF REGRETTING THAT IT DID NOT TAKE THE ACTION IT COULD TO DETER THE SYRIANS NOW, DAYAN CONTINUED. SYRIA KNOWS ISRAEL CAN STOP IT MILITARILY. "IF WE SHOOT DOWN HALF A DOZEN OF THEIR PLANES THEY WILL KNOW
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WE ARE SERIOUS."

11. AT THIS POINT BEGIN INTERRUPTED AND SAID THAT AFTER RETHINKING HIS PROPOSAL (PARA 2 ABOVE) HE BELIEVES THAT

PRESIDENT CARTER SHOULD SEND A PERSONAL LETTER TO ASSAD IMMEDIATELY SO THAT THE US EMBASSY IN DAMASCUS WILL HAVE PROMPT ACCESS TO THE SYRIAN PRESIDENT. BEGIN WAS CONCERNED THAT OTHERWISE WE MIGHT SPEND DAYS TRYING TO GET THROUGH TO THE REAL DECISIONMAKER. REPRESENTATION AT A LOWER LEVEL, BEGIN SAID, IS NOT PRODUCTIVE. BEGIN REITERATED THAT PRESIDENT CARTER MUST ASK FOR A CEASE-FIRE. THERE MUST BE "NO MORE SHOOTING." IF ASSAD SHOULD USE CAMP DAVID AS A SCREEN TO CONTINUE ACTION FROM LEBANON, "THIS IS A MISUSE AND WOULD BE INTOLERABLE TO US."

12. DAYAN ADDED THAT ISRAEL WANTS TO PUT EVERYTHING ON THE TABLE AND BE 100 PER CENT HONEST. ISRAEL IS FACING THREE MILITARY CRISES: A) SYRIA IS THREATENING TO TAKE OVER OR BLOCKADE THE NORTHERN CHRISTIAN PORTS. IF THEY SHOULD TRY THIS, THE GOI WILL BE FACED WITH THE PROBLEM OF WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT BY USE OF ITS LAND, SEA OR AIR FORCES; B) IN BEIRUT, IF SYRIA GOES INTO THE CHRISTIAN QUARTERS THE GOI WILL BE ASKED BY THE CHRISTIANS TO DO SOMETHING MILITARILY; C) SYRIA HAS TRIED TO CONVERT THE LEBANESE SKY INTO A SYRIAN SKY BY CHALLENGING ISRAELI RECONNAISSANCE FLIGHTS SINCE LAST WEEK. THIS IS A CHANGE. "IS ISRAEL TO ACCEPT IT?"

13. AT THIS POINT WEIZMAN INTERJECTED THAT THE SITUATION IS HIGHLY VOLATILE. IF FORCED TO ACT ON THE QUESTION OF RECONNAISSANCE FLIGHTS, THE GOI WILL NOT GO IN WITH

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TWO OR THREE AIRCRAFT TO SHOOT DOWN A FEW SYRIAN PLANES. THE IDF WILL "BRING IN THE ELEPHANT" (MEANING THAT OVERWHELMING FORCE WILL BE USED).

14. I ASSURED THE PRIME MINISTER THAT I WOULD CONVEY THE FULL DETAILS OF THIS CONVERSATION TO WASHINGTON AND BE BACK TO HIM AS SOON AS I HAVE A RESPONSE. I THEN WENT OVER THE POINTS CONTAINED IN REF A CONCERNING OUR PLANS TO CALM THE LEBANESE SITUATION. THE PRIME MINISTER SAID HE VERY MUCH APPRECIATED OUR EFFORTS AND HOPED THAT THE PRESIDENT WOULD ALSO BE ABLE TO ACCEPT HIS SUGGESTION ABOUT A DIRECT APPROACH TO ASSAD. HE EMPHASIZED THE NEED TO DEAL WITH LEBANON BEFORE HIS DEPARTURE FOR CAMP DAVID AND SAID I SHOULD CALL HIM AS SOON AS WASHINGTON RESPONDS.

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15. THERE FOLLOWED SOME BRIEF DISCUSSION OF UNIFIL AND SOUTH LEBANON WHICH IS BEING REPDRTE SEPTTEL.

16. COMMENT: THE ISRAELI MESSAGE WAS VERY CLEAR: IF THE SYRIANS TRY TO CLOSE THE NORTHERN PORTS, MOVE IN FORCE AGAINST THE CHRISTIAN AREAS OF BEIRUT, OR CHALLENGE ISRAELI RECONNAISSANCE FLIGHTS OVER LEBANON, THE ISRAELIS MAY FEEL COMPELLED TO REACT MILITARILY--CAMP DAVID NOTWITHSTANDING. BEGIN SEEMS CONVINCED THAT ANYTHING LESS THAN A HIGH-LEVEL US APPROACH DIRECTLY TO ASSAD MIGHT FAIL TO GET ACROSS THE MESSAGE STRONGLY ENOUGH. (REF C HAD NOT BEEN RECEIVED WHEN I DEPARTED FOR THE MORNING MEETING.)

17. AS THIS WAS BEING DRAFTED, ISRAELI RADIO BEGAN CARRYING STORIES OF THIS MORNING'S MEETING. THE THRUST OF THE REPORTS IS THAT THE GOI HAS POINTED OUT THE GRAVITY OF THE SITUATION IN LEBANON TO THE US AND ASKED THE USG TO CONVEY A WARNING TO SYRIA. HART

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Message Attributes

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